

LutherFacts #20

After his dramatic actions of October 31, 1517, Martin Luther faced increased clerical resistance regarding his views on indulgences. The next year passed without a direct challenge from any opponent. Soon, however, Johann Eck, a well-known Dominion scholar and defender of the Pope, criticized Luther's theses, calling for a public debate to take place in Leipzig. During June 1519, Eck debated Andreas Karlstadt, the chancellor of Wittenberg University, over the role of free will in good works. Then in July, Eck confronted Luther over issues raised in the Ninety-Five Theses. In a series of highly tense exchanges, the two men battled over indulgences, purgatory, and papal authority. During the course of the debate, Eck made a reference to "Lutherans," the first use of the term to label supporters of Luther. Also, Eck forced Luther to admit that his reliance on "scripture alone" was heretical by established church standards. In the end, however, Luther used that admission to reiterate his belief in the primacy of scripture in nurturing faith. In addition, he was able to reject publicly the use of indulgences, the existence of purgatory, and the supremacy of the papacy because they were not mentioned in the Bible. Luther successfully turned the tables on Eck at a crucial time when opposition was mounting against him.